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ABSTRACT

Skills needed by college reading specialists are discussed, based on a review of the literature. Training begins at the undergraduate level, with a scholarly academic foundation, rather than with an abundance of methods and materials courses. Knowledge of the theoretical base of both the reading and the learning process is stressed, with particular emphasis on characteristics of college/adult learners. Along with learning methods for teaching reading and study skills, the specialist must be exposed to the published instructional materials and specialized equipment for developmental and remedial readers. A solid background in research literature and research methodology is also needed. Since many reading specialists also serve as program directors, administrative and counseling skills are also important. A basic requirement for the college reading specialist is a set of personal characteristics, including flexibility and leadership qualities. Studies that have discussed the following components of the college reading curriculum are identified: comprehension, critical reading, reading rate/flexibility, reference skills, retention/memory development techniques, spelling, study reading, study skills, test taking skills, time management skills, and vocabulary development. A list of references is appended. (SW)

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College Reading and Learning Assistance

Technical Report 84-05

THE PROFESSIONAL PREPARATION OF COLLEGE READING AND STUDY-SKILLS SPECIALISTS

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Introduction

Over the past 15 years the number of institutions of postsecondary education which offer programs designed to upgrade students' college reading and study skills have grown considerably. By 1980 it was reported that there were nearly 2,000 college learning centers in the United States and Canada (Sullivan, 1980). In spite of this rapid growth, professional educators have not yet agreed upon a set of competencies or instructional experiences for the College Reading Specialist (Enright & Kerstiens, 1980; Roueche & Snow, 1977; Stahl, 1981).

Professional educators in the field of reading have long been interested in standards for the preparation of elementary and secondary reading teachers, but not until the early 1960's did the subject of standards for the College Reading Specialist begin to surface in the literature. Many leaders in the field have put forth personal observations and recommendations. A limited number of research studies and surveys has been conducted. All have attempted to answer the question: What skills should the College Reading Specialist possess? It is the intent of the authors to provide an answer to this question, based on a comprehensive review of and the authors' responses to the literature.

Undergraduate Training. The literature (Stahl, 1981) has shown that many College Reading Specialists (hereafter referred to as Specialists) have traditional teacher training backgrounds, and hence are weak on the factual information and philosophies

underlying numerous academic disciplines. Recent national reports such as a Nation at Risk (1983) have been critical of the preponderance of methods courses at the expense of the liberal arts in the undergraduate preparation of prospective teachers. Relative to this concern, experts have proposed that the Specialist possess a broad academic background (Ahrendt, 1975; Price & Wolfe, 1968; Stahl, 1981). Special emphasis was placed on (1) the social sciences such as psychology and sociology (Carter & McGinnis, 1970; Price & Wolfe, 1968); (2) the sciences (Price & Wolfe, 1968); and (3) the humanities (Price & Wolfe, 1968). Only Carter and McGinnis (1970) have suggested that the future Specialist complete an undergraduate reading methods course. The Specialist must be a competent reader with a command of all the basic skills to be taught college readers (Cranney, Schenck, & Hellstrom, 1973; Price & Wolfe, 1968; Stahl, 1981). Finally, Price and Wolfe (1968) recommend that the intelligence and scholarly qualities which will permit a prospective Specialist to achieve mastery of the graduate program be assessed during the undergraduate years, with Carter and McGinnis (1970) suggesting the junior year as the appropriate time for initial screening.

Instructional Skills. The Specialist's primary duty is as a teacher of reading. As such, there is a core of knowledge deemed important by leaders in the field. Numerous experts (Carter & McGinnis, 1970; Johnson, 1967; Maxwell, 1966, 1969, 1973; Parker & Ross, 1975; Simpson, 1983; Streicher & Nemeth, 1977) advocate that the Specialist be cognizant of the theories

and models of learning and the processes of reading which underlie instructional activities. Furthermore, the Specialist should be exposed to the psychological and sociological literature detailing the characteristics of developmental and remedial learners seeking college reading services (Carter & McGinnis, 1970; Parker & Ross, 1975; Streicher & Nemeth, 1977).

Once a theoretical foundation of the reading and learning process is in place, the Specialist can be introduced to the approaches and to the methods of college reading instruction used in the class and lab (Streicher & Nemeth, 1977; Vavoulis & Raygor, 1973) as well as to the procedures followed at the elementary and secondary levels (Parker & Ross, 1975). The experts generally recommend that the Specialist learn the procedures for individualizing instruction (Carter & McGinnis, 1970; Cranney, Schenck & Hellstrom, 1973; Kazmierski, 1971; Parker & Ross, 1975; Price & Wolfe, 1968; Staiger, 1960) and for grouping of instruction (Carter & McGinnis, 1970; Cranney et al., 1973; Stahl, 1981). In addition, Specialists should learn a variety of methods and techniques for teaching college reading (Hiler, 1975; Livingston, 1974; Parker & Ross, 1974; Streicher & Nemeth, 1977). Teaching skills for 11 specific components of the college reading curriculum have been mentioned in the literature:

(1) comprehension (Cranney et al., 1973; Kinne, 1962; Parker & Ross, 1975; Streicher & Nemeth, 1977),

(2) critical reading (Streicher & Nemeth, 1973),

(3) reading rate/flexibility (Cranney et al., 1973; Kinne, 1962; Parker & Ross, 1975; Streicher & Nemeth, 1977),

(4) reference skills (Parker & Ross, 1975),

(5) retention/memory development techniques (Parker & Ross, 1975),

(6) spelling (Maxwell, 1966; Parker & Ross, 1975),

(7) study reading (Cranney et al., 1973; Maxwell, 1966; Parker & Ross, 1975; Streicher & Nemeth, 1977),

(8) study skills (Cranney et al., 1973; Maxwell, 1966; Parker & Ross, 1975; Streicher & Nemeth, 1977),

(9) test taking skills (Kinne, 1962; Maxwell, 1966; Parker & Ross, 1975),

(10) time management skills (Parker & Ross, 1975; Streicher & Nemeth, 1977), and

(11) vocabulary development (Kinne, 1962; Maxwell, 1966; Parker & Ross, 1975; Streicher & Nemeth, 1977).

Both Parker and Ross (1975) and Price and Wolfe (1968) have further advocated the ability to integrate the language arts into the instructional program.

Along with learning methods for teaching reading and study skills, the Specialist must be exposed to the published instructional materials (Raygor & Vavoulis, 1973) as well as the specialized equipment for both developmental and remedial readers on the market (Maxwell, 1966; Raygor & Vavoulis, 1973; Streicher & Nemeth, 1977), and be able to evaluate these commercial products (Maxwell, 1966; Parker & Ross, 1975; Price & Wolfe, 1966; Streicher & Nemeth, 1977). When published material is determined to be wanting or does not fit the specific needs of a pupil, the Specialist must be able to make appropriate modifications (Hiler, 1975; Livingston, 1974) or devise original materials (Ahrendt, 1975; Hiler, 1975; Livingston, 1974; Maxwell,

1966; Raygor & Vavoulis, 1973; Wortham, 1967) and software (Hiler, 1975; Wortham, 1967).

The Specialist must learn how to match materials to the students' needs (Kazmierski, 1971; Parker & Ross, 1975; Price & Wolfe, 1968). In many cases this is achieved through the use of diagnostic processes leading to remedial instruction (Hiler, 1975; Raygor & Vavoulis, 1973) or to medical referral (Johnson, 1967; Maxwell, 1966; Streicher & Nemeth, 1977). When developmental rather than remedial instruction is warranted, knowledge of college course content should be used by the Specialist in planning instructional activities directly supportive of the student's mastery of the subject matter (Stahl, 1981; Streicher & Nemeth, 1977).

Measurement and Research Skills. Closely related to the instructional skills necessary for the Specialist are those measurement skills that enable the diagnosis of student needs and the evaluation of student progress. Recommendations include proficiency with informal and formal procedures, skill in evaluating the instruments themselves, and knowledge of a variety of assessment procedures.

Specialists should be proficient with informal diagnostic procedures for identifying learning problems (Carter & McGinnis, 1970; Livingston, 1974; Maxwell, 1966; Parker & Ross, 1975; Raygor & Vavoulis, 1973; Simpson, 1983; Staiger, 1960) and they should be able to develop their own informal procedures (Hiler, 1975; Kazmierski, 1971; Parker & Ross, 1975; Simpson, 1983).

They should also know how to administer, score, and interpret formal standardized diagnostic tests (Carter & McGinnis, 1970; Livingston, 1974; Maxwell, 1966; Parker & Ross, 1975; Staiger, 1960). Skill in critically evaluating the quality of the instruments themselves, both norm-referenced and criterion-referenced measures, is necessary (Carter & McGinnis, 1970; Livingston, 1974; Parker & Ross, 1975; Raygor & Vavoulis, 1973; Streicher & Nemeth, 1977). Once initial screening has occurred, the Specialist needs skill in ongoing diagnosis of learning problems and in evaluating student performance and progress. Cranney et al. (1973) and Maxwell (1966) suggest skill in using tests, interviews, and case studies, with Parker and Ross (1975) and Raygor and Vavoulis (1973) supporting knowledge of the case study technique. Most of the expert recommendations focused on the necessity of the Specialist to be skilled in the use of formal and informal achievement measures (Ahrendt, 1975; Livingston, 1974; Parker & Ross, 1975; Raygor & Vavoulis, 1973; Simpson, 1983; Staiger, 1960, Streicher & Nemeth, 1977).

Knowledge of the research process and the research foundation for college reading is essential for the Specialist. The Specialist should be a consumer of research, aware of the new theories and studies published in professional journals and able to discern their practical applications (Eanet, 1983; Maxwell, 1966; Raygor & Vavoulis, 1973; Vavoulis & Raygor, 1973). Eanet (1983) recommends broad knowledge of the literature regarding effective teaching and learning in higher education, and, along with Kazmierski (1971) and Cranney et al. (1973), knowledge of

current studies in developmental, late adolescent, and adult psychology. Streicher & Nemeth (1977) and Simpson (1983) advocate the application of research skills to the evaluation of instructional methods, curriculum, and curriculum revision.

While being well informed about the research of others, the Specialist needs specific research skills in order to implement, conduct, and evaluate research. Coursework in statistics, research design, and measurement is therefore advised (Price & Wolfe, 1968; Kazmierski, 1971; Raygor & Vavoulis, 1973). The research that is then conducted by the Specialist should be published (Maxwell, 1973).

Administrative and Counseling Skills. While it is true that not all Specialists will become program directors, experts recommend, nonetheless, that they possess a broad array of administrative skills and competencies.

The Specialist should be able to supervise paraprofessionals and professionals (Ahrendt, 1975; Maxwell, 1966), with appropriate inservice training experiences for tutors (Ahrendt, 1975; Livingston, 1974; Maxwell, 1966; 1969, 1973; Streicher & Nemeth, 1977) and professional staff (Ahrendt, 1975; Streicher & Nemeth, 1977). The Specialist should serve as a college reading consultant on and off campus (Livingston, 1974; Raygor & Vavoulis, 1973; Streicher & Nemeth, 1977), interacting with and training content area teachers (Livingston, 1974; Maxwell, 1966, 1969, 1973; Parker & Ross, 1975; Streicher & Nemeth, 1977; Wortham, 1967).

Program development and maintenance is another major area of administrative responsibility. The Specialist should therefore be able to set program goals and objectives (Ahrendt, 1975; Parker & Ross, 1975) and to develop corresponding learning programs (Ahrendt, 1975; Livingston, 1974; Streicher & Nemeth, 1977). Additionally, the Specialist must be skillful at budgeting programs (Ahrendt, 1975; Livingston, 1974; Parker & Ross, 1975; Raygor & Vavoulis, 1973), at managing and keeping records (Cranney et al., 1973; Kinne, 1962; Raygor & Vavoulis, 1973; Streicher & Nemeth, 1977), and at engaging in public relations and conducting advertising for programs (Maxwell, 1966, 1969, 1973). Finally, the Specialist must be able to evaluate programs with respect to transfer of learning skills (Kinne, 1962; Staiger, 1960), to publish in-house program evaluation data (Parker & Ross, 1975), and to write overall program assessments in the form of annual reports (Maxwell, 1969).

Other important administrative competencies recommended in the literature include developing and maintaining relationships with academic departments (Carter & McGinnis, 1970; Maxwell, 1969, 1973; Staiger, 1960) and administrative units on campus (Kazmierski, 1971; Wortham, 1967), as well as serving on campus-wide committees (Maxwell, 1973). It is recommended that the Specialist be knowledgeable of institutional traditions and requirements (Maxwell, 1973): (1) the organization of curricula and courses within academic units (Kazmierski, 1971; Livingston, 1974; Maxwell, 1966, 1969, 1973), (2) the courses with high

failure rates (Parker & Ross, 1975), and (3) the history and role of the college reading program on the Specialist's campus.

Finally, some experts recognize that the Specialist often fulfills the role of advisor/counselor. Therefore, it is recommended that the Specialist be knowledgeable in such areas as scheduling procedures, campus regulations, and transfer and graduation requirements (Livingston, 1974; Parker & Ross, 1975). The Specialist should also act as a referral source, directing students to appropriate campus agencies (Livingston, 1974; Maxwell, 1973).

Personal Characteristics. Underlying all the preservice training, all the internship experiences a teacher preparation program can provide the prospective College Reading Specialist, is a set of personal characteristics that will ultimately determine the Specialist's success or failure, happiness or disenchantment within the given academic mileau. Both at the program entry-level and at the internship level, careful evaluation of the future Specialist's personal characteristics must be undertaken jointly by the candidate and the professional adviser. While there exists no published instrument specific to the assessment of personal qualities for potential professional success in college reading programs, experts in the field have specified a number of characteristics useful in determining a candidate's personal foundation for the role of College Reading Specialist.

Basic to the role of the Specialist as a teacher is a

genuine positive regard for students who are drawn from a wide range of socioeconomic and academic backgrounds (Hiler, 1975; Maxwell, 1969, 1973; Parker & Ross, 1975; Price & Wolfe, 1968; Streicher & Nemeth, 1977). The role demands a true desire to assist young adults to meet their varied degree objectives (Parker & Ross, 1975). Furthermore, the Specialist must be empathetic towards the problems that students are encountering in academic coursework (Carter & McGinnis, 1970; Hiler, 1975; Maxwell, 1973; Streicher & Nemeth, 1977). In part, this quality is based on one's own understanding of and experiences with the undergraduate curriculum, as discussed earlier in this paper. It is paramount that the Specialist be a flexible individual readily willing to adapt both programmatic procedures and instructional methods or techniques to meet the needs of specific students (Hiler, 1975; Kazmierski, 1971; Price & Wolfe, 1968). Hand in hand with flexibility goes the creativity to develop student centered learning programs (Price & Wolfe, 1968).

The Specialist must be able to demonstrate leadership qualities when interacting with faculty and administrators within the program and throughout the institution (Maxwell, 1973; Price & Wolfe, 1968). What is more, it is not just leadership skills but also the Specialist's staying power (Johnson, 1967) in the face of adversity that is required. Yet, the innermost requirement is a personal feeling of self worth (Stahl, 1982) and a strong commitment to the college reading program and profession (Staiger, 1960).

Conclusion

The requisite skills for the Specialist, as identified by experts in the field of college reading, are extensive and diverse. First, training begins at the undergraduate level, not with the traditional preponderance of methods and materials courses, but with the establishment of a scholarly academic foundation. Second, knowledge of the underlying theoretical base of both the reading and the learning process, with particular emphasis on characteristics of college/adult learners (from the remedial to the developmental to the proficient), is recommended as the foundation for instructional skills. Third, just as theory provides a foundation for instructional skills, so a solid background in research literature and research methodology provides a foundation for the Specialist's measurement and research skills. Fourth, while the Specialist's primary responsibility is as a teacher of reading, many will serve at some time in their careers as program directors, thus necessitating a broad array of administrative and counseling skills. Finally, for training in the skill areas identified to be worthwhile, the future Specialist must bring to the graduate program a set of personal characteristics indicative of the candidate's suitability for the profession.

While not delineated by the experts, it is clear from this review that the Specialist must be precisely that; a specialist in college reading. Clearly, a generalist in higher education, developmental education, or reading will not suffice. What is

more, it cannot be expected that graduate coursework alone will provide the Specialist all the necessary skills. The future Specialist must enter a graduate program a competent reader, with the appropriate personal characteristics, and with a solid academic undergraduate background, and then complete the program able to apply theory and methods in a manner fitting the unique demands of the Specialist's institution. In recognition of the limitations of graduate coursework, the future Specialist must be provided with extensive internship experiences and later lifetime opportunities for professional development.

Finally, an area deserving greater attention is the need for an agreed upon set of standards. As in the legal and medical professions, the criteria experts establish should determine the training provided and serve as the standards for evaluation of the Specialist as an internship and as a professional in the field. Without standards the profession cannot (1) adequately prepare Specialists for the rigors of college reading instruction, (2) ensure the well-being of Specialists and students alike, and (3) promote excellence in the field of college reading.

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